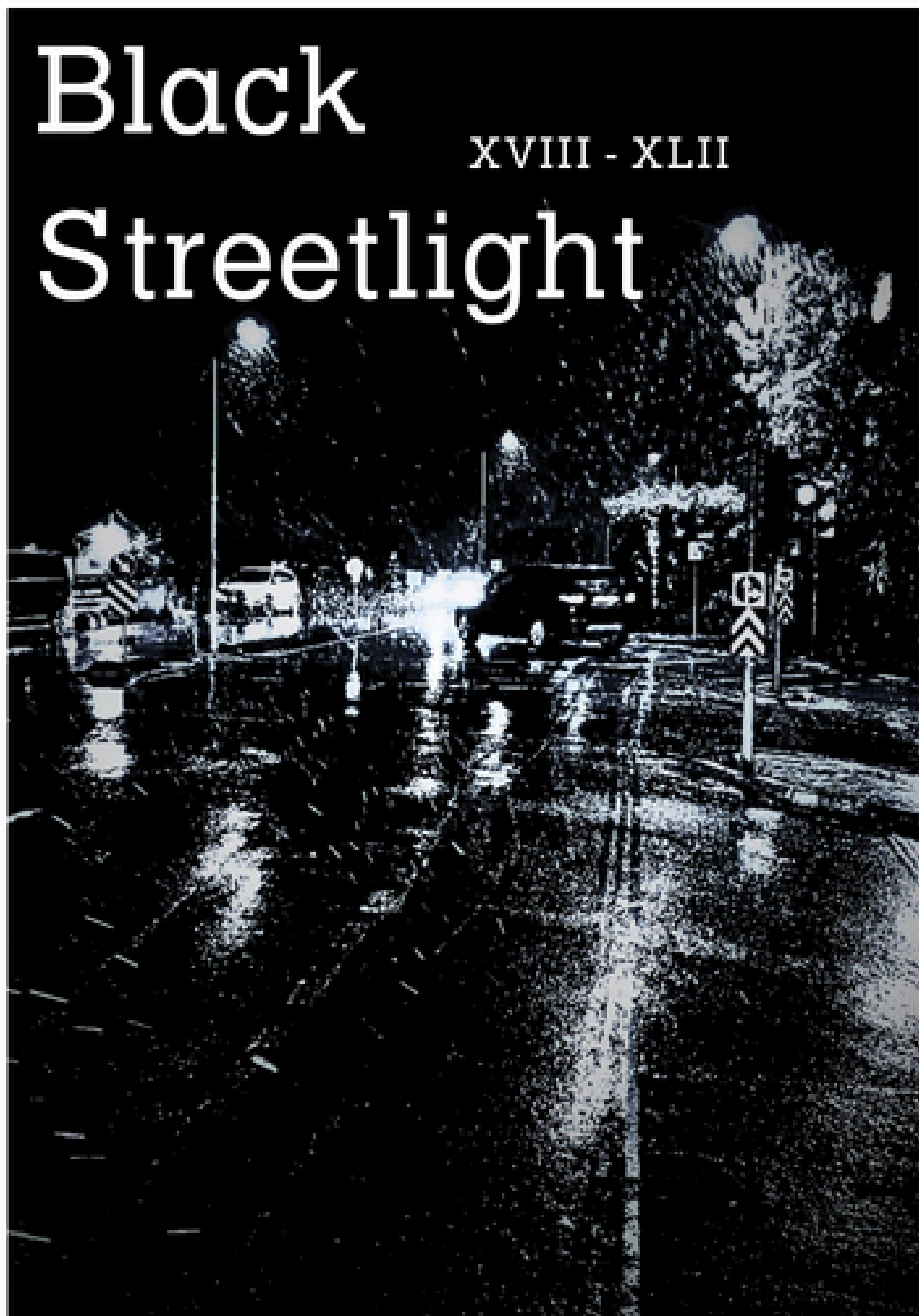


Black

XVIII - XLII

Streetlight



Black Streetlight
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First Digital edition

instead emits what is
dark, snuffing out the light from
the world.

Black Streetlight: a streetlight
that, instead of emitting light and
illuminating the darkness;

Chapter XVIII

Footsteps are echoes. Ethereal, and with each repetition, they decay— like the waves they send through wet puddles. Waves are also echoes, in a way. Echoes of the motion, but different from footsteps; they are echoes of motion not exerted from the outside, but what happens within.

I could dedicate a lifetime to walking. Every step is an act that depletes me, in exchange for a desire— movement. The very act of fulfilling desire necessitates an internal contract, and leaves ashen echoes behind. A lifetime spent entirely on fulfilling what I desire... that would be my perfect life. A lifetime, spent creating endless, ethereal echoes.

And tonight, my footsteps have brought me to a ferry station, awakening me from the dizzying sound of endless, fleeting echoes. Under yellow lights, with the wet, unkempt concrete floor, and the smell of catfood in the turnstile, I reach into my pants pocket, fishing around. None around me, makes the humiliating process of bending over to push my throbbing cold hand, deep into the cloth material, much easier.

And my efforts are rewarded, with a single, plastic, flimsy card. I press the card to

the turnstile, the blue turning to green on a screen in front of my very eyes, I pass through. The waitroom is absent, like a tray in the night, devoid of a meal. I seat myself to a weary, sticky, worn out “leather,, parting my legs and thrusting my empty arms through the space. My head bobs to the side, focused on the lines between the tiles, on the tray. Filthy. Sticky.

Thoughts of nothing in particular fill my mind. They occupy, echoing endlessly in an empty skull. I dig in my pants pocket once more, attempting to fish out the card, for merely a single look. It doesn’t come out.

I change seats. One closer to the window, further from the door. This one, is not sticky, however, much more worn out. The “leather,, is peeling at the seams, exposing the sponge beneath. Bobbing my head to the side reveals nothing, as the yellow-lit reflection absorbs any and all view of the outside I might have through the blackened window. Merely but one isolated streetlight, that I do not dwell on for more than a second.

How marvellous it is, that glass reflects. What I use to see through, looks back at me. The void stares, and the decay that drips down turns into footsteps, as I step away, unable to look outside for too long. How cowardly.

Walking in circles
entertains not. It's a waste of the
echoes, the mud that drips down
my boots, and the desire to go
nowhere, yet still necessitating a
payment. A deal is a deal,
however, and soon I get tired,
and take a third, uneventful seat,
in front of the digital, red clock.
Twenty-three-thirty-nine.

A fluttering, warm,
smoky gust escapes my chapped
lips, reaching and dissipating
through the air. A breath is...
also an echo. It is an echo of
what is inside, turned into
motion. A gust of wind emerges
deep within the lungs— it
shakes, catches dust, and
through the chapped lips of a
faded, tired man; it escapes into
the atmosphere, dividing itself
into oblivion, each wave more
wilted than the last.

What once was alive will
dissipate. What once was bright
will never shine. What once was
transparent, reflect you nothing
but the void, staring at empty
eyes filled with nothing in
particular. What was once living,
will carry on, all without you.
Such is the rule of life. Such are
the words that turn into shapes
with my lips, but never are
vocalised, sitting in that spongy,
disgusting seat.

What is left behind the
dissipated breath, is once more,
the red clock. My tortoise,

halfway-draped eyelids, raise to
the north without a sound. Read
in a faint whisper than escapes
my lips, the numbers on the
unpolished, sharp mess of
rectangular metal.
Twenty-three-fifty-nine. I missed
my ferry.

Chapter XIX

A mirror is an echo of oneself. That's what I murmur every time I stare at the crude, undecorated silver plane in the bathroom wall, before proceeding to shove my finger into my throat.

First, it's slow. Fingers slowly enter the mouth, nails graze the nooks and crannies of the inner teeth. The lips tremble for less than a second, then tense. Fingers go deeper, as the knuckles gently kiss the upper lip— chapped, but wet.

Then, the hesitation. For less than a second, the mind remembers it does not want to regurgitate. However, the hand is committed. The hand knows what's best. The deal made between mind and body is unbroken.

And so, the fingers press into the wall of the throat, repeatedly. Until the crude, animalistic, detestable reflex lets itself show- the hand retreats, as if regretting what it did. The internal, becomes the external. Everything comes out.

Repeatedly, this carries on. The external trespasses on the internal. The internal pours everything outside. Over and over again. Until everything goes black.

I am left panting, with tears in my eyes, shaking, whimpering; hugging the sink, on my knees. My ears ring painfully, pulsating with blood. The trembling rhythm, like a broken metronome.

How utterly disgusting am I.

The vomit washes off from the ceramic bowl with a firm upper flick of the tap. With a spiral, they disappear into the black hole that is the sink. I cannot bear the sight, and let out a drop of spit from my grazed mouth, letting the sticky, glass liquid droop down into the foaming waters below.

I raise my tortoise eyelids to the mirror once more, confirming it is, indeed, myself, whom I am seeing.

He, who looks back, is me. His long, oily and unkempt hair is covered in the wavy tips with a mossy residue. His knees, once blue, are now stained with vomit, defecation, urine, and whatever other substances were on the floor. His shirt's top button is undone, his tie swinging idly, about to come loose of the knot.

The worst part are his eyes. Deep tortoise, slow, almost retarded in movement. Such a disgusting, pathetic thing. Blinking is a chore for him.

I sigh, and avert. The
ringing in my ears subsides,
replaced by the bass, coming
from the backroom of the bar
bathroom. The bass doesn't fully
reach here, but the pulses and the
trembling does. Like an echo of
noise, it sends waves through the
puddle I stand in. No footsteps.

Chapter XX

Shit. I'm covered head to toe; in vile, filth, and all that is detestable. The warmth that would come from a shower at other times is absent. Now, instead, it is replaced with fleeting bursts of boil, followed by minutes of ice cold water.

I stare absently at the shower curtain. Wet, humid, and mold beginning to form around its edges. The water falls over my hair, making it stick to itself and my skin.

Filth. From head to toe. I am covered, constantly. Not a single moment passes where this body is "clean,,.

So I look down at my hands. Turn around. My fingers, gently graze the knuckles of my right hand, in a way the water of the shower never would.

And I punch the shower wall.

...

One.

...

Two.

...

Thr

Chapter XXI

Walking to the bus station at night, I once again bend over in order to throw my bandaged hand into my pants pocket. I fish around for what's merely a second this time, as my hair drapes around my field of vision like twisted, wavy tendrils. When the skin comes back into view, my fingers are wrapped around a steel cigarette case, and a lighter.

My cigarette case is steel. I got it for quite cheap, from a random bazaar. It fits long cigarettes. Sometimes when I put it in my pocket, the latch gets stuck, and I have to pry it open with my teeth. Today is not one of those times.

With a gust from my lips, and the echoing of my footsteps against the fewly numbered passing cars alongside the pavement, I unlock the cigarette case. One small flick splits it in half, revealing its delicate insides.

With twitching hands, a single short, white paper stick; finds its place between my lips. Then comes a mechanical, black box. A single sound of stone against steel engulfs the tip of the stick in flames.

And just like that, a few steps equates to the bus stop. Standing under the roof creates

dastardly, exhibitionist, shadows, the source of the crime originating from the stick between my fingers, travelling from there to my lips, and returning again.

Three. There is nothing else for me in this street. Smoking, and footsteps, and waiting, are all there is to its existence. For all intents and purposes, this street may as well not exist. But it does.

This cigarette is all that makes life meaningful in this very moment. Without it, I would risk being engulfed alive by the jaws of the street—the buildings, its teeth; the road, its curving tongue; and the pavement, its gums.

All of that meaning disappears as the cigarette, half smoked, prematurely hits the floor. A worn-out, stained in mud leather boot stomps its flame out, before the boot boards a recently arrived bus.

Chapter XXII

I awoke with a cockroach
on my bed. Its twitching
antennas, skittish movement,
rapid legs reminded me of
myself.

At first I thought about
releasing it through the window.

When it fled, I opted to
crush it instead.

Chapter XXIII

The void is illuminated constantly. Streetlights, open windows, neon signs, car flashes, buildings... they all have one job. To provide light to what is otherwise dark.

Humans instinctively feel discomfort at the dark. It is wired deeply within us, something we cannot shake off, no matter how hard one tries.

Most of the time it isn't even the fear of what may be lurking within, it is the inability to sit without knowledge. What is dark is what is unknown. What is unknown is what one cannot prepare for. We hate being unprepared. To the point we decorate the skies with false light, a lying afterimage of knowledge.

By extending our "liveable,, hours so long, we have gained many. Jobs, commute, bars, drinking...

On the contrary, we have lost all that makes the sky, the sky. No more stars. No more void. No more unknown. Our pursuit of endless control has left us thirsty, starving for something we wish we did not have.

I am the biggest offender of "light pollution fetishism,,. I, as a man, am drawn like a fly, into the light. Every streetlight,

every graffiti that becomes visible when it shouldn't, every neon sign that invites me inside, every small act of sin that erases the stars in an unconsensual contract to illuminate the world.

So why, now, staring, flat on my back, at the ceiling, I wonder, if I miss the stars?

I am all that is black in a world of light. A black streetlight.

Chapter XXIV

My boots are covered in mud. Sticky, warm mud that's too close to spirit, even if not at all close to body.

The road from school to home was uneventful. Though I suspect it must have occurred somewhere along the way, as they were "clean,, before I set foot home.

My memory is quite fuzzy, for some reason. Normally I behave excellently in recalling moments and memories.

When did the mud get on my boots?

Was it when I tripped on my lace, almost planting myself into the grassy fence?

Was it when I crossed the road, without waiting for the red light?

Surely not from discarding a singular cigarette from its case because it was ripped from the filter.

When did I get mud on my boots?

Was it when I stared at the floor, bag between legs?

Was it with hot breaths, a damp backroom?

Was it when I closed my tortoise eyes, and shut my chapped lips?

Or was it in that grocer?

What a stupid question. There would be no mud in a grocer.

There was no pinching of my cheek, no uttering words, no rustling, no quiet footsteps, no talking of life.

It's as if I never had mud on my boots at all.

Yet it feels like I am covered head to toe in utter shit.

Chapter XXV

What is ordinary is
precious. It is the scent of
cigarettes in an enclosed room.
The sight of the familiar door
I've grown accustomed to
scratching with my keys.

What is ordinary is what
keeps me safe. Ordinary is
powerful, because it keeps things
in check with others. Syncing
into reality is the best way to not
sink below it.

That's why today, I am
an ordinary kid. I will lie in bed.

Chapter XXVI

I'm going to fucking kill
that grocer. I am going to
bludgeon him to death with tears
in my eyes, screaming murder at
him until he passes out.

Of all the things I
thought would never happen to
me, this one stung the most.

I am going to fucking
murder that grocer.

Chapter XXVII

Footsteps are echoes.
That's what I tell myself with
every single step, closer to the
subway station. They're
ethereal— and with each
repetition, they decay and wilt.
Like waves on the puddles my
muddy boots walk through.

Each act of stepping one
foot forward is leaving another
foot back. That is the cost of
taking a step. The bodily
contract never ends, as all
desires are only fulfilled for
something in return. A return
which the mind seldom cannot
pay the body, even if it may
regret it.

It's a dark sky, the night.
Quiet, black and mixed with
faint brushes of grey clouds.
Nothing is audible except the
soft ringing of cricket calls. The
trees swing idly in the breeze,
though no leaves fall. The rocks
glisten under artificial light, left
by streetlamps, mechanically
posted exactly 20 meters apart.
There are no stars. No stars, for a
dark void, fittingly for a walk in
the dark.

The entrance to the
subway station is an exposed
hole in the concrete floor, with 2
escalators, and glass panels to
the side. I quietly step on the
working one, and then fall
absolutely still. There is no need

for a movement. No need to take
a step. For a moment, nothing
has a cost. Nothing necessitates
a contract.

As the darkness fades
and the false light envelops,
however, that bliss ends. With
yet another step, I take off the
escalator, and release a sigh,
with no one around to hear.

Another step. This time
towards the turnstile. I emptily
walk past the vending machines
and card machines, as they serve
no use to me. Each step releases
a humble, quiet echo throughout
the empty subway station, where
not even the turning of turnstiles
interfere with the silence.

And with one final step, I
find myself standing in front of
one. A raggedy, metal-looking
thing, with a screen on it
showing a vehement, infinite
blue gradient. A past me would
have found that beautiful.

This one does not. I do
not fish around in my pocket for
the card, as it is already in my
hand. I press it into the reader,
and with that, no effort is needed
to be rewarded, and I pass
through the turnstile, leaving
many more echoes in my wake.

The 2 next escalators do
not give bliss. I walk down
them. Every step produces yet
another wave in the puddle,
another echo through the silence.

XXVIII

A mirror is an echo of oneself. That's what I murmur every time I stare at the crude, undecorated silver plane in the bathroom wall, before proceeding to shove my finger into my throat.

My fingers hesitate. That familiar trigger is still there. I push further. This time my knuckles graze my teeth. It's a methodical, almost calm motion. So is the regurgitating that follows.

I stare quietly at the remnants left behind as the tap gets clicked open. Not as much as last time.

The music... as the ringing and the blood thumping fades away, all that is left is the decayed music reaching the bathroom. I find myself closing my eyes, and imagining breaking the mirror.

Chapter XXIX

Every footstep has a price. Every step taken leads somewhere you aren't prepared for. That's why, today, I am staying at home.

I give myself in, to the sheets above my body. Lying there, under the covers. The soft smell of laundry detergent, slight mold, and most of all— cigarette smoke, lingers in the air.

The covers are soft. Washed recently, not with a washer, but by hand. It's the softest I'll get to a bed that's actually a bed, and not a resting place.

I close my eyes. My bare feet rustle against the bottom of the covers, a singular toe peeking out from underneath, and disappearing as quickly as it came.

My eyes keep themselves closed, almost on instinct. I can feel the soft fabric, brushing against my palm. It's cool, like a breeze in the night. The window is closed, as if to trap all of the smoke within. My idle hand reaches for the familiar coldness of the steel case. I click the latch open, and when it doesn't, I bring it to where my lips are.

I bite the latch, and keep it tight and steady. I can feel the slight nooks and crannies from

where my mouth damaged it, having done this many times. I hold the other end of the button with my hand, and pull.

The case opens, revealing its ordinary insides. I reach inside without even looking, and with a cold, mechanical flick, light it with the lighter.

I let the ashes fall onto the blanket. No paper cup with water to catch them.

Chapter XXX

An echo lies in a
footstep. Each one is birthed,
lives on, and then decays into
death. Too short for anyone to
notice.

Those who understand
the contract between mind and
body, do not view the death of
an echo as something to be
saddened by— but rather,
something that weighs on the
self. Every step is a weight.

However, an unusual
lack of it settled atop me, as I
walked towards the pier.

I passed through the
grouped benches, closeby,
walking on the chipped, faded
and ruined pavement.

At some point, I was on
the road. A car passed through,
blowing its warm, disgusting air
in my face. I kept walking.

The turnstile awaited me,
same place as before. Under
yellow lights, with the dry,
unkempt floor, and the smell of
fish in the air, I reach into my
pocket.

The turnstile is open
when I see it, and I pass through.
My hand stays in my pocket, and
eventually leaves without
grabbing anything.

I sit in the same chair. In
the same faded, dirtied, spongy
“leather,, chair.

Twenty-thirty-four.

Chapter XXXI

A mirror is an echo of oneself. That's what I murmur every time I stare at the crude, undecorated silver plane in the bathroom wall, before proceeding to shove my finger into my throat.

This time there is no hesitation. The hand enters my throat smoothly, pulsating within the liminal space as my fingers poke at the back of my throat. There is no gentle kiss to the knuckle, there is no feces and vomit on my knees, and there are no ghostly shadows in the reflection.

I don't vomit.

I try again. My fingers push in deeper— tears rush to my eyes as I am forced to retreat my arm back outside.

Still no regurgitation.

I take a moment to stare at the mirror. That person, who looks back, is still me. His long, oily and unkempt hair is clean. His knees, are blue. His shirt's top button is undone, his tie swinging idly, about to come loose of the knot, unchanged.

The worst part are his eyes. This time, they're dead. No movement, no false light, no violence behind those eyes. Just a pathetic, retarded sort of

calmness, staring right back at me.

The ringing in my ears stops. The music still plays in the background.

Can't tell what it is.

Chapter XXXII

Today, I found a dead
roach on my bathroom floor.

It wasn't moving at all.
Normally they twitch, scurry or
move their antennae.

I poked it with my foot to
see if it would come back to life.
It did not.

I threw it out of my
windowsill, sliding the paper
alongside the surface until it fell.

And so, I am alone again.

Chapter XXXIII

A footstep is a memory.
A memory fades.

Walking through the
road, and the pavement, I
couldn't bring myself to light a
cigarette.

The thought of seeing the
delicate insides of the steel case
once more,

Made me want to puke.

With the scent of smoke
from cars passing by, trapped in
the air, I allowed the street to
engulf me completely.

A rather blissful feeling.

Chapter XXXIV

The paper cup is filled with cigarette butts. It is getting progressively harder to fit new ones inside.

The blanket is no longer soft.

Chapter XXXV

The footsteps no longer
create echoes. The bond between
mind and body is broken.

Chapter XXXVI

The pavement is silent.

Chapter XXXVII

And the mind, too.

Chapter XXXVIII

Bliss.

Chapter XXXIX

Lies in stillness.

Chapter XL

A Black Streetlight.

Chapter XLI

Appears from the black
window.

Chapter XLII

Staring back at me.